Review
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The author signals early that this work is not written for the anthropologist: "This book is written as a case study of inter-ethnic relations between two culturally distinct peoples who happened to have a common racial identity" (p. xiv). The confusion of the concepts race, ethnic, people, and culture continue throughout the volume. Except for those flaws, the "introduction" of the book gives an insightful account of the role of the Black church as a central institution in the community of the Afro-American and the extension of that role in the evangelization of Africa. The Black church was a means of social mobility, leadership training-aspiration, status, and visibility. Such social status acquired international note in the context of the evangelization of Africa. Thus, the author successfully argues that the foreign mission movement was more important than the "back-to-Africa" emigration movements in creating pan-African sentiments among Black Americans. Unfortunately these sentiments were prevalent in Black religious movements and governed by the "dominant Western attitudes of the era."

Chapter 1 describes the development of the attitudes that resulted in the mission movement. Religious leaders saw personal advantages in "saving" the "savages" of Africa. In the tropical areas of personal discomfort and disease, they reasoned that Afro-Americans would be better suited to serve God in redeeming their "own people." The White churches financed these Black missionaries. The chapter is replete with dates, places, and "great men," as is most of the book, and this makes for difficult reading. It points out the energies, efforts, sacrifices, and commitments of Afro-Americans devoted to sub-Saharan Africa long before the pan-African movements of the 20th century.

Chapter 2 gives a brief history of the Black church in America and its emerging role after Emancipation as a most important social institution in the new Black community. The Black church heeds the biblical call and responds to the White churches' solicitation for mission work. The Black church extends its hand to Africa.

The other chapters proceed mechanically according to their descriptive titles, except for chapter 4, in which the author attempts a brief psychohistorical analysis of the missionary motivation of particular individuals. This is so brief as to be of little value. The author vascillates between espousing the rhetoric of his missionaries to "spark a glorious future for black people in both Africa and America" (p. 103) and recognizing their debilitating ethnocentrism.

The book is well edited, aside from some repetitions, such as "the Indianapolis Freeman, one of the most influential black newspapers" (pp. 26, 133). It has a useful bibliography. And the author has collected vast amounts of information. But I would recommend this volume only to those interested in the names, dates, and places of this mission movement. The Black evangelization of Africa is not much different from the White evangelization of Africa. The Black church disappoints me in Africa as it disappoints me in America. And once again we see that Afro-American propensity for expressive behavior—singing, dancing, playing, and church—while its instrumental processes are all too often exhibited in its resounding rhetoric.


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John Kennedy starts out this valuable collection about a fabled land with a poignant reminder of our priorities. The building of the high dam in Aswan, Egypt, captured the imagination of the world. A great international project was undertaken to save the ancient monuments of the land, but the living culture of the people who had to be relocated did not receive much public attention. About 50,000 Nubians living in Egypt and another 50,000 living in the Sudan had to be suddenly uprooted and moved into newly prepared settlements far removed from the Nile. What was their old culture like? And how did they fare in their new location?

A large research project was organized in 1961 to record the ethnography of old and new Nubia. People from the Nubian Ethnological Survey, the American University of Cairo, and American and Egyptian anthropologists such as Robert Fernea, al-Hamamsy, and others were involved. The fieldwork evidently spawned numerous graduate theses and at least 4 of the 11 chapters of the present book edited by Kennedy, a senior member of the research group, contain the findings from these works.

The book opens with an all too brief but informative introduction to Nubia, its history and religious background, written by Kennedy. We are told about the relations of Nubia with Egypt and Africa. We learn that Nubia was Christian until fairly recent times. Little is mentioned about the slave trade, whose routes up to the Mediterranean went through this region. There are the famous "cannibals" to the south, feared as are the "yum-yum" in the Middle East (the Niamniam of Evans-Pritchard in his Azande book). We
learn that there are two or three different local languages being used by the Nubians, and that most of the men are bilingual in Arabic and a local Nubian language, while most of the elder women do not know Arabic but utilize one of the Nubian languages in the home. So many of the men work as migrants in Egypt that many communities are mainly populated by women.

The introduction is followed by a description of daily prayers by Fahim and a section by Fahim and Kennedy on trancelike recitations (dhikr) which could come from almost any part of the Islamic world. Observations on the Sufi orders special to Nubia, such as the Mirghaniyya and the Dayfiyya, are provided. The authors argue that with the decline of recitation-trances, changes are taking place toward further secularism in religious behavior. al-Messiri contributes an informative chapter on the cult of the Sheikhs which is reminiscent of the Sanussiya order of dervishes and their organization in North Africa. The wider organization of the Sheikhs, their relationships to the tribal structure, seems to be part of the old political organization of Nubia and would merit fuller attention in a separate monograph.

From here on we turn to more specifically Nubian culture. al-Gundi writes on Angels in the Nile with astute observations on their role in exorcism and life-cycle rituals. Grauer and Kennedy contribute a chapter on beliefs regarding possession by Evil River Beings. This material, based on fieldwork carried out in the women’s own local dialect (kenzi) is noteworthy since it draws upon ethnographic information gathered over 50 years by Gertrude von Massenbach as a missionary among the Kenuz section of Nubians.

Apart from a detailed chapter by al-Katcha on changes in wedding ceremonies, the book concludes with a number of worthwhile chapters by Kennedy on the following topics: taboos, male circumcision and female excision, the zar cult as psychotherapy, and death rituals. Kennedy says engagingly that what is valuable in anthropology is descriptive ethnography and that theory has in the past had little survival value. This is fine as long as it is clearly understood that what is described is in turn inescapably structured by an implicit or explicit “theory,” or at least organized by the observers’ own categories, biases, and interests. There is no way out of this dilemma except by a self-conscious recognition of the powerful role of native and observer categories in descriptive and analytic ethnography.

Even with the disclaimer, the Kennedy chapters on taboo, on circumcision, and on the spirit cults as psychotherapy are quite theoretical. I found the controversial circumcision and the spirit cults chapters more rewarding than the rather old-fashioned discussion of Durkheim, Radcliffe-Brown, and Freud on the sacred and the profane. Kennedy seems unaware of Lévi-Strauss’s and other’s contributions to the subject which have taken these issues to shores other than those where Fortes and Evans-Pritchard had left them off. Questions of sacred and profane are clearly matters of categories, a subject on which there has been a flood of theoretical writing in recent years.

Kennedy provides perceptive discussions of the unpleasantly technical topic of female excision, subincision, clitoridectomy, infibulation, and what have you. These arresting rituals, extensively practiced with various degrees of enthusiasm from Egypt down through the Sudan into East Africa, have not received the careful and comparative attention they deserve. Kennedy describes the Nubian situation, which includes infibulation and is dramatic enough. It is referred to as “Pharaonic” and “Sudanic” in style: “it removes the clitoris and closes the vulva with scar tissue.” Sometimes the child’s legs “remain tied together for forty days.” A consequence of this is that it has to be followed by yet another surgical intervention by a mid-wife “to open the vagina” at marriage. Kennedy searches for the answers in the effects of the customs on individual consciousness (gender role initiation, male-female tension, inculcation of obedience) and is left uncertain. It seems clear that the complex of sewing up the female vagina (as well as its preparation for “access”) is part of the single-minded preoccupation with female purity and virginity. The Nubians state this clearly. Their customs, terrible as they are, seem to be particularly “painful” examples of a more general obsession with female sexuality by society at large. (Witness the ongoing dialogue of the deaf regarding abortion even in these supposedly enlightened days in this society.) Why the Nubians, Egyptians and East Africans go in for such gross mutilation is another matter. It is evidently intended to create a sort of “chastity belt.” Note that the custom is not uniform in the Middle East. And it is apparently not practiced in the north: it is not reported for Syria and Iraq. It seems to be unknown in Iran and Turkey. Maybe it is replaced by the harem institution? The harem, behind high walls, guarded by eunuchs, may not be very effective in the control over women—as Mozart shows in his opera The Abduction from the Seraglio—but at least it seems less surgical as a method.

Some of Kennedy’s most perceptive points are made in connection with the zar (spirit possession) cults as psychotherapy. He notes the power of symbolism in its “multidimensional” evocative effect and shows how the marshaling of such cultural forms “throws the weight of all positive Nubian traditional values on the side of the patient.” Many anthropologists have reported these general facts. One appears to be able to take the detailed structural analysis of the symbolism much further. Recent research on curing ceremonies in Sri Lanka (M. Egan, A Structural Analysis of a Sinhalese Healing Ritual [Ph.D. dissertation, Cambridge University]; Bruce Kapferer, A Celebration of Demons [1983]) indicates that in ritual, as in theater or poetry, all the communication structures utilized by the culture can be investigated with precision in terms of the symbolic and affective power they contribute to...
Forced displacement of populations has become a common occurrence in the modern world. What happens to these people? Often there appear journalistic accounts of the people’s suffering, after which we seldom hear of them again. Were it not for Dr. Hussein Fahim, such might have been the story of the Nubians who were forced to relocate by the formation of the great lake behind Aswan Dam in Egypt. In the early 1960s the flurry of publicity and interest in the antiquities which were to be covered by the lake motivated massive archaeological expeditions in Nubia. Almost as a by-product of this activity, the previously almost unknown society of the Nile Nubians became a focus of ethnographic salvage. Dr. Fahim, a member of the original project by the Social Research Center of the American University in Cairo, in 1963, has continued to monitor the effects of Nubian resettlement during the ensuing 20 years.

The Nasser government saw the relocation of Nubians as a means to bring this isolated group into the mainstream of national life. However, even though massive amounts were spent for resettlement, the preparation of the new villages was too hasty, the reclamation of desert land was incomplete when the people arrived, and they were not adequately prepared for change. Much of this book describes the traumas of coping with problems of the “transitional” period. The removal from their spacious, sculptured, widely distributed clay houses above the Nile into dreary compact rows of small concrete and stone structures with adjoined walls, with no place for sheltering animals separately, and far from the “mother” river, was stressful in the extreme. So also were the shortages of food, increases in diseases and mortality, problems with drainage and irrigation in some areas, the forced interaction with feared upper Egyptian strangers who surrounded the resettlement area, and so on. Fahim devotes considerable space to documentation of responses to these difficulties and makes many useful recommendations to those who may become involved in planning such projects.

The relocation process was not entirely negative, however. New services such as electrification, transportation, and communication were provided. The new towns, in which service occupations had “preadapted” the Nubians to both the amenities and problems of modern life, and their resettlement in one location in Kom Ombo facilitated their abilities to act as a unit in the complex politics of Aswan Province. The Egyptian government mistakenly assumed that because they were given new lands, they would all become good farmers. Laws were instituted which allowed only two feedlands of land per household, prohibited transfer of land, disallowed sharecropping, and specified that 40 percent of the land must go to sugar cane. After an initial influx to the resettlement area, many of the Nubians reacted by migrating back to the city and surreptitiously hiring upper Egyptian sharecroppers. They followed patterns in existence prior to the latest dam; the subgroups which had had the highest percentages of urban migrants (Kenuz and Arab) by 1976 had nearly reverted to their predam levels, while those who had mostly been farmers in Nubia (Fadija) followed the government’s plan. The Fadija also produced bigger crops of sugar than the other more urbanized groups. There is also a movement to return to the shores of Lake Nasser, which now covers their ancient homeland. This nostalgic and perhaps unrealistic response apparently only involves a few hundred actual settlers, but it touches a chord in the heart of all Nubians.

The book concludes with some generalizations and lessons learned from the longitudinal study of Nubian relocation process, and with some personal comments and thoughts of the author. Fahim has been frustrated by the lack of use of social science knowledge by responsible agencies, but emerges hopeful that his work will facilitate future planning of resettlement projects.

The strengths of this book lie in its uniqueness as a continuing record of such change processes, and as the story of a native anthropologist’s growth. Its weaknesses stem from structural ambivalence created in indigenous anthropologists by the fine line they must tread in their own coun-

*E*nglish Nubians: Resettlement and Years of Coping. HUSSEIN M. FAHIM. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1983. xii + 195 pp., maps, references, index. $20.00 (cloth).

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